

GETTING GOD BY GOD

~~We are on the eve of an important moment in our nation's~~

~~history~~

exhibition, interest campaign

One of the by-products of a zealous political campaign, this one in particular, has significant theological overtones. It ^{was} clearly expressed in the televised funeral eulogy for American civilization which I ~~mentioned~~ ^{heard on the radio}. It is, essentially, the question of the reality of God. Part of being a political partisan is the conviction that the end will come if the opponent is elected. This is obviously the sincere conviction of the elderly gentlemen who were speaking for the Republican party. And I am certain that there are many Democrats who are convinced that civilization will never recover if the Rep. are elected. Now, this may be good politics, but it is not very good theology.

I think all of America is aware that this is a highly crucial national election. Rep. Goldwater's Rep. and Pres. Johnson's Dem. crowd clash head on at many points. As we go to the polls to exercise our freedom of franchise we face a clear cut choice. But I do not think it has been a good campaign. The issues upon which this election should be decided have been muffled and too frequently ignored. Instead we have had to endure an endless stream of vindictive personal slander. We have been told by some that the Rep. candidate is an irresponsible Fascist and that his Dem. counterpart is a dishonest socialist. As a minister of the Church--an institution that must demand integrity and responsibility--an institution that must stand for the dignity of man, I cannot help but be critical of both parties. And in all sincerity I ask you to rise above the flood of charges and counter charges--and to cast your ballot on the basis of the differences the real issues that do exist.

inherent danger that -

The end result of a political campaign revolving around the most powerful office in the world--is the assumption that history is in our hands. That America's fate, and beyond that, the world's fate, is in the hands of one party or another. In this matrix it becomes difficult to believe in a God who is really God. Both parties are sure that God is on their side. But I'm not talking about a conservative God or a liberal God but a God who is the judge of all nations; a God who does not stand idly by while his creatures create their own destiny, but a God who participates in that history; a God who acts in and through the well off historical events to work his will. If this God exists, I see little evidence that we believe he exists. And if he does not; if there is not a God who acts in history; then it is neither the Rep. or the Dem. but the Christian church that has pulled a cruel hoax.

The election draws the question into focus. But it is a question that is with us always. Stated academically the question is this; "Does God really take an active part in the affairs of man? Or does he stand idly by? Is God present in our nation; life our community life--our personal life--or is he absent? Is God like a clock maker, who created the world, wound it up--and now sits in his heaven observing it run down? Or is the creator God in history along with man? Is he man's partner in the daily, weekly and yearly events, which together comprise the story of history?

As an academic question it is important. Philosophers of despair beginning with Nietzsche, have claimed that God is dead; this God who acts in history never was and never will be--and it is time for man to stand on his own two feet and realize that he is in control. Last week the French Novelist Phil. Jean Paul Sartre, won and refused the Nobel Prize. His works, with titles like "No Exit" and "Nausea" cry out in compassion for a humanity with no hope. For Sartre there is no room for Grace no room for God--and his philosophy of existence teaches that man is man only when he abandons childish faith and murses himself in the fate of all men.

And so philosophers and theologians do spirited battle--and you may wonder what this has to do with us. | It is my conviction, however, that this question is extremely relevant to you and me; and furthermore, we ask it and answer, perhaps not so academically, every day of our lives. | Every believes in god; but is it not true that he is a remote God whose presence is affirmed in creed--and then denied in life? | Everyone believes in God--but is he not a rather tame and domestic God whose sole purpose is to reinforce our prejudices, political, social and personal? | Everyone believes, in God, but is he a God who exists in my neighbor whom I refuse to serve at my restaurant because his skin is black; is he a God who walks with me as I enter the mill, the classroom or the kitchen? | Is he a God who raises up men and nations to carry out his will; a God who judges and loves all men; | A God who has the power and immediacy to touch my life and make me a new man? | If he is not, then he is not really God at all; rather he is a diety of my own creation, a God, spelled with a little "G." that I have made in my image--and whose presence or non-presence depends on my will not his. *~~asking the underlying question of "who is in control"~~*

This is a question we answer, every day. | It is a question we cannot escape. | It is a question that appears once again as we approach election day, thinking about the future of our nation, our civilization, and the entire world. *asking the underlying question of "who is in control"*

The writers of the O.T. were not at all hesitant to see God at work in the affairs of men. | In fact, the watershed of Israelie faith is the Exodus from Egypt and the journey to the promised land. | The Israelites saw one thing in these tremendous events--the work of God. | It was God who brought them out of Egypt--it was God who brought them across the Red. Sea. It was God who made a covenant--an agreement with them at Mt. Sinai. It was God who gave them the land and allowed them to conquer and settle it. From beginning to end the O.T. tells the story of a God who acts in history; a God who intercedes in human affairs; a God whose presence is so real that all of life revolves around his commandments, his law and his will for

his people. The O.T. is not squeamish about it; there is not an event-- great or small--in which the eye of faith cannot see the hand of God. Perhaps this is the reason the contemporary Christian Church largely ignores the O.T. Perhaps we shudder at the thought of an Amos seeing God's hand in the Civil Right's movement; or a Jeremiah barging into the high counsels of Govt. to announce God's will. Perhaps, we simply don't believe in that kind of God at all.

Our scripture lesson this morning is part of a letter, written by a great man of faith, to a band of miserable, disheartened, captive Jews. For 70 years the cream of Israelite culture had been forced to live in exile in Bbbylon. In a superficial way the times might be compared to our own. Many nation states were tottering. The once mighty Babylon was being eroded and ~~awakened~~ ^{reawakened} by border disputes and arrogant vassal kings. And from the East came a flood of rumors about a conquering hoard of Persians, under Cyrus, sweeping all opponents away with ease. It was a tense and anxious time. And the captive Jews in Babylon wondered about it all. Where is this Almighty God? Why has he allowed his people to suffer, to totter on the brink of extinction.

To these people, in these precarious times came the words of the Prophet; "Listen to me in silence, O coastlands, let the peoples renew their strength; let them approach, then let them speak; let us draw near for judgement." The prophet sees the hand of God in the conquering Persians "Who has called the generations from the Beginning? I, the Lord, the first, and with the last; I am he." He assures the people that God is not "in absentia." "fear not, for I am with you, be not dismayed, for I am your God' I will strengthen you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand."

The Persian armies conquered Babylon, and one of Cyrus's first acts was to free the Jews and send them back to their homeland. Again the Jews knew it was their God--the God of Abraham and Jacob--who had acted in history on their behalf.